

TURNED BACK.

Just Now People Are Moralizing on Time's Flight.

Set-Backs Are Frequently Good Things for Christians—The Highest Heavenly Seats Are For Good People—Dr. Talmage's Sermon.

Dr. Talmage's text on Sunday was: II. Kings xx. 11. "And Isaiah, the prophet, cried unto the Lord: and He brought the shadow ten degrees backward by which it had gone down in the dial of Ahaz."

Here is the first clock, or watch, or chronometer, or time piece of which the world has any knowledge; but it was a watch that did not tick, and a clock that did not strike. It was a sun-dial. Ahaz, the king, invented it. Between the hours given to statecraft and the cares of office he invented something by which he could tell the time of day. The sun dial may have been a great column, and when the shadow of that column reached one point it was 9 o'clock a. m., and when it reached another point it was 3 o'clock p. m., and all the other hours and half hours were so measured. Or, it may have been a flight of stairs, such as may now be found in Hindustan and other old countries, and when the shadow reached one step it was 10 o'clock a. m., or another step it was 4 o'clock p. m., and likewise other hours may have been indicated.

The clepsydra or water-clock followed the sun-dial, and the sand-glass followed the clepsydra. Then came the candle-clock of Alfred the Great and the candle was marked into three parts, and while the first part was burning he gave himself to religion, and while the second part was burning he gave himself to politics, and while the third part was burning he gave himself to rest. After awhile came the wheel and weight clock and Pope Sylvester the Second was its most important inventor.

And the skill of centuries of exquisite mechanism toiled at the time-pieces until the world had the clock of the fourteenth century, and Huyghens, the inventor, swung the first pendulum, and Dr. Hooke contrived the recoil escapement. And the "endless chain" followed, and the "ratchet and lever" took its place; and the compensation balance and the stem-winder followed, and now we have the buzz and clang of the great clock and watch factories of Switzerland and Germany and England and America turning out what seems to be the perfection of time-pieces. It took the world 6,000 years to make the present chronometer. So with the measurement of longer spaces than minutes and hours. Time was calculated from new moon to new moon; then from harvest to harvest. Then the year was pronounced to be 354 days and then 364 days, and not until a long while after, 365 days. The events were calculated from the foundation of Rome, afterward from the Olympic games. Then the Babylonians had their measurement of the year and the Romans theirs and the Armenians theirs and the Hindoos theirs. Chronology was busy for centuries studying monuments, inscriptions, coins and mummies and astronomy, trying to lay a plan by which all question of dates might be settled and events put in their right place in the procession of the ages. But the chronologists only heaped up a mountain of confusion and bewilderment until in the sixth century, Dionysius Exiguus, a Roman abbot, said: "Let everything date from the birth at Bethlehem of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world." The abbot proposed to have things dated backward and forward from the great event. What a splendid thought for the world! What a mighty thing for Christianity! It would have been most natural to date everything from the creation of the world. But I am glad the chronologists could not too easily guess how old the world was in order to get the nations in the habit of dating from that occurrence in its documents and histories. Forever fixed is it that all history is to be dated with reference to the birth of Christ, and, this matter settled, Hales, the chief chronologist, declared that the world was made 5,411 years before Christ, and all the illustrious events of the last nineteen centuries and all the great events of all time to come have been or shall be dated from the birth of Christ. These things I say that you may know what a watch is, what a clock is, what an almanac is, and learn to appreciate through what trials and hardships and perplexities the world came to its present conveniences and comforts, and to help you to more respectful consideration of the sun-dial of Ahaz planted in my text.

We are told that Hezekiah, the king, was dying of a boil. It must have been one of the worst kind of carbuncles, a boil without any central core, and sometimes deathful. A fig was put upon it as a poultice. Hezekiah did not want to die then. His son, who was to take the kingdom, had not yet been born, and Hezekiah's death would have been the death of the nation. So he prays for a recovery and is told he will get well. But he wants some miraculous sign to make him sure of it. He has the choice of having the shadow on the sun-dial of Ahaz advance or retreat. He replied it would not be so wonderful to have the sun go down, for it does go down sooner or later. He asks that it go backward. In other words, let the day, instead of going toward sun-down, turn and go toward

sunrise. I see the invalid king bolstered up and wrapped in blankets looking out of the window upon the sun-dial in the court-yard. While he watches the shadow on the dial the shadow begins to retreat. Instead of going on toward 6 o'clock in the evening it goes back toward 6 o'clock in the morning. The fig poultice had been drawing for some time, and, sure enough, the boil broke and Hezekiah got well. Now I expect you will come on with your higher criticism, and try to explain this away, and say it was an optical delusion of Hezekiah, and the shadow only seemed to go back or a cloud came over and it was uncertain which way the shadow did go, and as Hezekiah expected it to go back he took the action of his own mind for the retrograde movement. No; the shadow went back on all the dials of that land and other lands. Turn to II. Chronicles, 32, 31, and find that away off in Babylon the mighty men of the palace noticed the same phenomenon. And, if you do not like the Bible authority, turn over your copy of Herodotus and find that away off in Egypt the people noticed that there was something the matter with the sun. The fact is that the whole universe waits upon God and suns and moons and stars are not very big things to Him, and He can with His little finger turn back an entire world as easily as you could set back the hour or minute hand of your clock or watch.

At the opening of the new year people are moralizing on the flight of time. You all feel that you are moving on toward sundown, and many of you are under consequent depression. I propose this morning to set the hands of your watches and clocks to going the other way. I propose to show you how you may make the shadow of your dial like the shadow on the dial of Ahaz to stop going forward and make it go backward. You think I have a big undertaking on hand, but it can be done if the same Lord who reversed the shadow in Hezekiah's court-yard moves upon us. While looking at the sun-dial of Hezekiah and we find the shadow retreating, we ought to learn that God controls the shadows. We are all ready to acknowledge his management of the sunshine. We stand in the glow of a bright morning, and we say in our feelings if not with so many words, "This life is from God, this warmth is from God." Or, we have a rush of prosperity and we say: "These successes are from God. What a providential thing it was I bought that lot just before the rise of real estate! How grateful to God I am that I made that investment! Why, they have made 10 per cent dividend! What a mercy it was that I sold out my shares before that collapse!" Oh, yes; we acknowledge God in the sunshine of a bright day or the sunshine of a great prosperity. But suppose the day is dark? You have to light the gas at noon. The sun does not show himself all day long. There is nothing but shadow. How slow we are to realize that the storm is from God and the darkness from God and the chill from God. Or, we buy the day before the market's retreat; or we make an investment that never pays; or, we purchase goods that we can not dispose of; or a crop of grain is ruined by drought or frost; or when we took account on the 1st of January we found ourselves thousands of dollars worse off than we expected. Who, under such circumstances, says: This lot is from God, I must have been allowed to go into that unfortunate enterprise for some good reason; God controls the east wind as well as the west wind?

My friends, I can not look for one moment on that retrograde shadow on Ahaz's dial without learning that God controls the shadows and that lesson we need all to learn. That he controls the sunshine is not so necessary; a lesson, for anybody can be happy when things go right. When you sleep eight hours a night and rise with an appetite that can not easily wait for breakfast, and go over to the store and open your mail to read more orders than you can fill, and in the next letter you find a dividend far larger than you have been promised, and your neighbor comes in to tell you some flattering thing he has just heard said about you, and you find that all the styles of goods in which you deal have advanced fifteen per cent. in value, and on your way home you meet your children in full romp, and there are roses on the center of the tea-table and roses of health in cheeks all round the table, what more do you want of consolation?

I don't pity you a bit. You feel as if you could boss the world. But for those in just opposite circumstance my text comes in with an omnipotence of meaning. The shadow! Oh, the shadow! Shadow of bereavement! Shadow of sickness! Shadow of bankruptcy! Shadow of mental depression! Shadow of persecution! Shadow of death! Speak out, oh, sun-dial of Ahaz, and tell all the people that God manages the shadow! As Hezekiah sat in his palace window wrapped in invalidism and surrounded by anodynes and cataplasms and looked out the only clock known at that time and saw it move back ten degrees, he learned a lesson that a majority of the human race need this hour to learn—that the best friend a man ever had controls the shadow. The set-backs are sometimes the best things that can happen. The great German author Schiller could not work unless he had in his room the scent of the rotten apples, and the decay of the fruits of earthly prosperity may become

an inspiration instead of depression. Robert Chambers' lame feet shut him up from other work, and he became the world-renowned publisher, and helped fashion the best literature of the ages. The painful disorder like that of Hezekiah called a carbuncle is spelled exactly the same as the precious stone called carbuncle, and the pang of suffering may become the jewel of immortal value. Your set back, like that of Ahaz's sun dial, may be recovery and triumph. I never had a set back but it turned out to be a set forward. You never would have become a Christian if you had not had a set back. The highest thrones in Heaven are for the set backs. In 1861 the shadow of the sun dial of this nation was set back, and all things seemed going to ruin, and it was set back further in 1862, and further in 1863, but there is not an intelligent and well-balanced man, North or South, East or West, but feels it was set back toward the sunrise.

But I promised to show you how the shadows might be turned back. First, by going much among the young people. In most family circles there are grandchildren. By this Divine arrangement most of the people who have passed the meridian of life can compass themselves by juvenility. It is a bad thing for an old man or old woman to sit looking at the vicinity of their grandchildren, shouting: "Stop that racket!" Better join in the fun. Let the eighty-year-old grandfather join the eight-year-old grandson or grand-daughter. My father and mother lived to see over eighty children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren, and a more boisterous crew was never turned out on this sublimity sphere, and they all seemed to cry to the old folks, "Keep young," and they did keep young. Don't walk with a cane unless you have to, or only as a defense in a city afflicted with too many canines. Don't wear glasses stronger than necessary, putting on number tens when eighteens will do as well. Don't go into the country of those who are always talking about rheumatism and lumbago and shortness of breath and the brevity of human life. It is too much for my gravity to hear an octogenarian talking about the shortness of human life. From all I can find out he has always been here and from present prospects he is always going to stay. Remain young. Hang up your stockings in Christmas time. Help the boys fly the kite. Teach the girls how to dress their dolls. Better than arnica for your stiff joints and catnip tea for your sleepless companionship. Set back the clock of human life. Make the shadow of the sun dial of Ahaz retreat ten degrees. People make themselves old by talking about being old and wishing for the good old days, which were never as good as these days. From all I can hear the grandchildren are not half as bad as the grandparents were. Matters have been hushed up. But if you have ever been in a room adjoining a room where some very old people a little deaf were talking over old times you will find that this age does not monopolize all the young rascals. It may now be hard to get young people up early enough in the morning, but their grandparents always had to be pulled out of bed. It is wrong now to play mischievous tricks on the unsuspecting, but eighty years ago at school that venerable man sat down on a crooked pin not accidentally placed there, and purposely drove the sleigh-riding party too near the edge of the embankment that he might see how they would look when tumbled into the snow. And that man who has so little patience with childish exuberance was in olden times up to pranks, one-half of which, if practiced by the eight-year-old to-day, would set grandfather and grandmother crazy. Revive your remembrance of what you were between five and ten years of age, and with patience capable of every thing join with the young. Put back the shadow of the dial not ten degrees, but fifty and sixty and seventy degrees.

Set back your clocks by entering on new and absorbing Christian work. In our desire to inspire the young we have in our essays had much to say about what has been accomplished by the young; of Romulus, who founded Rome when he was twenty years of age; of Cortes, who had conquered Mexico at thirty years; of Pitt, who was prime minister of England at twenty-four years; of Raphael, who died at thirty-seven years; of Calvin, who wrote his institutes at twenty-six; of Melancthon, who took a learned professor's chair at twenty-one years; of Luther, who had conquered Germany for the Reformation by the time he was thirty-five years. And it is all very well for us to show how early in life one can do very great things for God and the welfare of the world, but some of the mightiest work for God has been done by septuagenarians. Indeed, there is work which none but such can do. They preserve the equipoise of senates, of religious denominations, of reformatory movements. Young men for action, old men for counsel. Instead of any of you beginning to fold up your energies, arouse anew your energies. With the experience you have obtained and the opportunities of observation you have had during a long life, you ought to be able to do in one year now more than you did in ten years right after you had passed out of your teens. Physical power less, your spiritual power ought to be more. Up to the last hour of their lives what power for good old Dr. Archibald Alexander, old Dr. Woods, old Dr. Hawes, old Dr. Milnor, old Dr. Melville, old Dr. Tyng, old Dr. Candlish, old Dr. Chalmers! What have been Bismarck

to Germany and Gladstone to England and Oliver Wendell Holmes to America in the time of an advanced age? Let me say to those in the afternoon of life: Don't be putting off the harness; when God wants it He will take it off. Don't be frightened out of life by the grip, as many are. At the first sneeze of an influenza many give up all as lost. No new terror has come on the earth. The microbes as the cause of disease described in the Talmud 1,700 years ago as "invisible legions of dangerous ones." Don't be scared out of life by all this talk about heart failure. That trouble has always been in the world. That is what all the people that ever passed out of this life have died of—heart failure. Adam had it and all of his descendants have had it or will have it. Do not be watching for symptoms. Symptoms are often only what we sometimes see in the country, a dead owl nailed on a barn door to scare living owls. Put your trust in God, go to bed at 10 o'clock, have the window open six inches to let in the fresh air, sleep on your right side and fear nothing. The old maxim was right: "Get thy spindle and distaff ready, and God will send thee flax!"

PRESENTLY IS TOO LATE.

Dealing in "Futures" Is a Rather Risky Business.

Never say you will do presently what your reason or your conscience tells you should be done now. No man ever shaped his own destiny or the destinies of others wisely and well, who dealt much in presentlies. Look at nature. She never postpones. When the time arrives for the buds to open, they open—for the leaves to fall, they fall. Look upward. The shining worlds never put off their risings or their settings. The comets even, erratic as they are, keep their appointments; and eclipses are always punctual to the minute. There are no delays in any of the movements of the universe which have been predetermined by the absolute fiat of the Creator. Procrastination among the stars might involve the destruction of innumerable systems; procrastinations in the operations of nature on this earth, might result in famine, pestilence and the blotting out of the human race. Man, however, being a free agent, can postpone the performance of his duty; and he does so too frequently to his own destruction.

The drafts drawn by indolence upon the future are pretty sure to be dishonored. Make now your banker. Do not say you will economize presently, for presently you may be bankrupt. Begin at once. Now is the time. Each present sacrifice makes future ones easier. The selfish man's weakness, his selfishness, can not be overcome by him, if he does not fight it at once. Do not think you will repent and make atonement presently, for presently you may be judged. Bear in mind the very important fact taught alike by the history of every nation, all rulers and private individuals, that, in at least three cases out of five, presently is too late.—N. Y. Ledger.

Invention of the Key-Chain

The key-chain wore by many gentlemen is the invention of a noted burglar, who spent many years of his life in a dungeon cell for plying his vocation in the hotels in this city. While at work one stormy night trying to turn the lock of a Walnut street door the false key dropped in the snow, and while searching for it a watchman came along and locked the burglar up and had him sent to Moyamensing. Having some ingenuity, he thought of having keys fastened to a chain so that when a limb of the law appeared he could fly without a thought about the keys, and found it worked like a charm. He has now seen the error of his ways, and lives comfortably on a royalty from the manufacturers.—Philadelphia Record.

—One of the most striking and one of the most encouraging signs of the times is the ever-increasing activity of young people in religious affairs. A few years ago they were noticeable for their absence from all ecclesiastical gatherings—like the images of Brutus and Cassius in the ancient imperial procession. Now they abound on all occasions, animating the scene and vitalizing the assembly with their young life.

—There is no sadder fallacy than that which maps out life and divides it into sacred and secular. All life is, or should be, sacred. Every day is a Lord's day. The world is our Father's house. Its busiest whirl and dustiest crossing and driest look may be calmed and cleansed and vitalized by a Christian motive. Borrow the motto of the King's Daughters and do all "in His name."

—Col. Ingersoll, in his recent address before the New York State Bar association, said: "As long as children are raised in tenement and gutters the prisons will be full; the gulf between the rich and poor will grow wider. One will depend on cunning, the other on force. It is a great question whether those who live in luxury can afford to allow others to exist in want."

—Spinoza boasted that he had turned the devil out of doors. Well, if he did, he has come in again, bringing seven other spirits with him, worse than himself, if possible. Human nature is bedeviled nowadays as almost never before; and, alas, since Spinoza is dead there is now no one to turn him out of doors again! Jesus Christ alone can do it. But many prefer Satan to Him.

—If the worm could have his way, he would never want to be a butterfly.

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